2013 Child and Family Poverty Report Card

Focusing on Aboriginal Kids and Families

Child and Family Poverty Report Card 2013

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Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

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Campaign 2000 (National)

> This House "seek(s) to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." *House of Commons, unanimous all-party resolution, November 24, 1989.*

Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada public education movement to build Canadian awareness and support for the 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Campaign 2000 began in 1991 out of concern about the lack of government progress in addressing child poverty. Campaign 2000 is non-partisan in urging all Canadian elected officials to keep their promise to Canada's children.

Campaign 2000

END CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

1. Introduction

The Campaign 2000 Child and Family Report Cards have tracked poverty in Canada for almost two decades. Campaign 2000 is a national coalition formed in 1989 after the all-party resolution in the Parliament of Canada was passed to end child poverty by the year 2000. While there has been some progress in reducing poverty levels in different provinces, there has not been an overall reduction in poverty across Canada (see the National Campaign 2000 Child and Family Report Card 2013).

There have been many policy changes at the Federal level to reduce Employment Insurance eligibility, decrease support for licensed child care, cut taxes, and reduce debt. Overall, these efforts have not helped people struggling to make it out of poverty. While there is no national poverty reduction strategy, most of the provinces have adopted strategic variations. Consequently, the Child and Family Report Cards were repetitive accounts on the state of social and economic conditions in Canada and Manitoba, and each year the number of children living in poverty did not change much.

This year, the Report Card for Manitoba will focus attention on how First Nations, Metis and Inuit children are faring. A large portion of the Aboriginal population continues to live in poverty and face huge barriers to a standard of living that other Canadians take for granted. Many Aboriginal People face social and economic factors that make it difficult to access services and the supports they need.

The history of colonization, residential schools, and government apprehension of children has left Aboriginal people in 2013 coping with intergenerational trauma, family separation, and loss of cultural identity. These continuing pressures make progress in reducing poverty extremely challenging.

In this edition of the Report Card, we also wanted to focus on what can be done about poverty, not just describe the persistence and characteristics of poverty. Therefore, most of this report looks at various ways government resources can help Aboriginal families who are living in poverty, and will examine the proposals for reducing poverty in the Provincial Government's All Aboard, Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In March of 2013, the Manitoba government released for discussion, its Proposed ALL Aboard Action Plans 2014-16 to address poverty. There are seven areas of action in the strategy, and three of those areas have been reviewed for this Report Card. Since then, in October 2013, two areas dealing with food security and supports for those most in need, were released as full Action Plans. Also in October, organizations working with Aboriginal children and families came together to review the Strategy, discuss what is needed to reduce poverty, and make recommendations for implementing ALL Aboard. With this report we want to improve the community understanding of ALL Aboard and subsequently we hope to strengthen the ALL Aboard Action Plan and its implementation.

This Report Card is also different from previous efforts in that it is intended to be a living and working reference for further discussion, analysis, and planning. In the next year we will be holding more discussions on the ALL Aboard Strategy, in collaboration with partners, to improve community understanding and engagement.

1.1. Summary of key recommendations

Here are the highlights of the recommendations in this report. There are some general suggestions that relate to the All Aboard Strategy, and more specific recommendations that relate to the three action areas in the Strategy. We recommend that the government;

- Practically engage community groups. The ALL Aboard Strategy would be significantly improved by better communication, sharing and cooperation among government, community partners and agencies. Currently the Strategy only minimally links to community resources.
- Set targets and timelines. If poverty reduction indicators are tied to targets and timelines, the proposed actions could be more effective. Applying targets to the Strategy also helps evaluate outcomes and then lead to more effective investment in programs.
- Address both the rate of poverty and the depth of poverty so all Manitobans living in poverty have some benefit from the Action Plan. This can be done through improvements to EIA incomes and programs like Rent Aid that Manitobans with the lowest incomes rely on.

A. Early child development and parenting supports

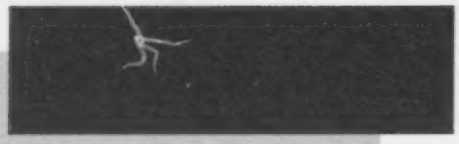
- Allow families on EIA collecting the Child Tax Credit to also qualify for Rent Aid and ensure the incomes of families who rely on EIA are closer to the poverty measure.
- Expand the Family First Program or Strengthening Families Program to all of the 64 First Nations Communities to meet the demand from new parents.
- Reduce red tape and barriers to establishing child care centres in schools, ensure child care centres in schools are not lost due to policy changes (I.e. the class size initiative and all-day kindergarten), and create a coordinated hub model for governing child care centres.

B. Creating opportunities for youth

- Engage youth serving organizations in the development and implementations of all components of poverty reduction initiatives.
- Use the Children and Youth Opportunities department to coordinate education, health and families services programming for children and youth.
- Connect work transition supports for youth more effectively to their training and education.
- Establish 24 hour safe places for youth in main urban centres and best access rural centres.
- Expand Jordan's Principle to other areas besides health like CFS, education, and housing.

C. Closing the gap for Aboriginal Manitobans

- Set goals to reduce the number of Aboriginal Children in care of CFS, and require child welfare agencies to shift emphasis to prevention and family support models that integrate Aboriginal traditions and approaches.
- Coordinate work with the Urban Aboriginal Youth Strategy to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal youth.
- Increase funding to organizations and programs that utilize Aboriginal culture and teachings as part of their support to children and families.



1.2. Background on ALL Aboard

In May 2009, Manitoba launched ALL Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy. While the strategy gave some substance to what the government thought was necessary to reduce poverty, it was seen as mainly a policy framework for action without implementation clout and substantive plans for action. The strategy identified education and employment as important parts of how poverty will be reduced, but it lacked further vision of what a government could do to prevent poverty as well as how to help people cope with poverty.

In June 2011, the Manitoba legislature passed important legislation giving some authority to the government's poverty reduction strategy. The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Act* will create the means to define, monitor, and enforce what the government does to deal with poverty and social exclusion. This act was embedded in Bill 51, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act establishes in law a framework the government must follow to reduce poverty. In particular, it creates a monitoring committee of government ministers and community members to review and advise on the strategy. Three community representatives were appointed to the committee. While this is an important administrative mechanism for government, it does not have the power to actually define programs or to hold government accountable if it does not implement programs. Also, there is still a need for external monitoring of government progress, which could be more comprehensive and engaged.

The *Act* requires government to take poverty reduction into account when preparing annual budgets, to prepare a yearly statement, and to develop indicators to measure progress of the strategy. These are also important to strengthening what government does to reduce poverty. According to the *Act*, for each fiscal year the government must:

(a) take the poverty reduction and social inclusion strategy into account when preparing the budget for that fiscal year;

(b) prepare a statement that summarizes the strategy and sets out the budget measures designed to implement the strategy, and sets out the poverty reduction and social inclusion indicators prescribed by regulation that will be used to measure the progress of the strategy; and

(c) table the statement (referred to above) in the Legislative Assembly at the time of tabling the budget for that fiscal year.

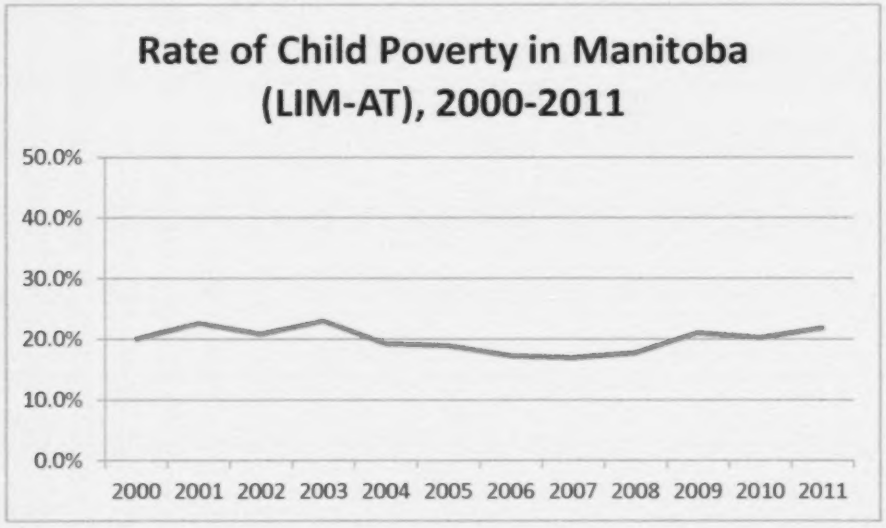
While the government has positioned the Departments of Family Services and Consumer Affairs, and Housing and Community Development, as the leads in implementing the ALL Aboard strategy, it does acknowledge all of government will be involved in a serious approach to reducing poverty in the province.

2. Profile of poverty 2013

While Canada has no official poverty line or poverty measure, Campaign 2000 and the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg have chosen to use Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure-After Tax. According to this measure, children who live in households with incomes of less than 50% of the median income for a particular household size are poor. Income after taxes is used because this represents the disposable income of the household.

We use this measure because it is most strongly related to the health, social and developmental effects of poverty. It takes into account all aspects of poverty, and not just material deprivation. This measure includes the inability to participate in society, exposure to harsh and stressful environments, psychological comparisons with the affluent, as well as discrimination and stigmatization. It is also the measure used for international comparisons.

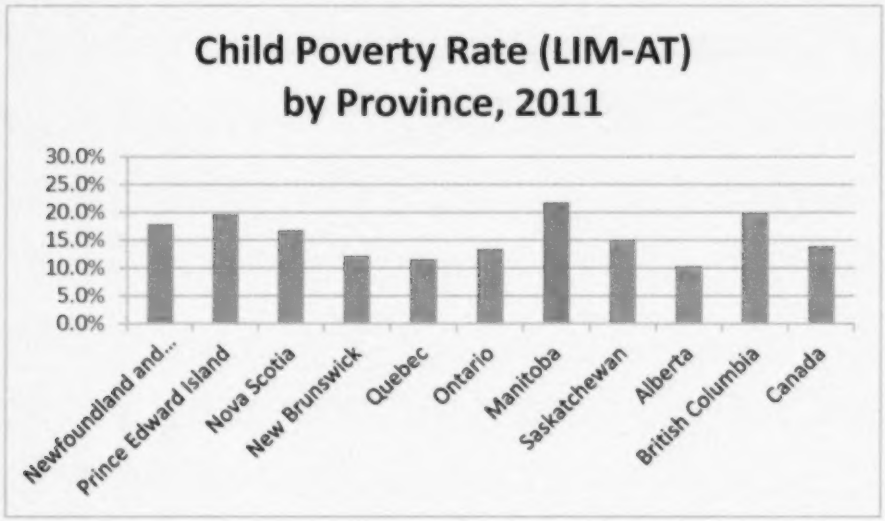
Alarmingly, in 2011 over one in five children (22.4%) in Manitoba were poor (59,000 children, Cansim #202-0802 based on LIM). This is well above the rate for all of Canada (18.7%). The Manitoba child poverty rate was 23.8% in 1989. The 2011 rate represents a decline in equity for Manitoba's children, as the poverty rate in Manitoba is 5.5% worse that it was in 1989. In 2008 the child poverty rate in Manitoba was 21.8%. Since 2009 when the Government of Manitoba introduced the ALL Aboard Poverty Reduction Strategy, rather than going down, child poverty in Manitoba has gone up by 3.3%.



In 2009, the LIM-AT household of four was $37,562

Source: Statistics Canada (2011). Income in Canada, CANSIM 202-0802.

Because of Statistics Canada sample size issues, the poverty rate can only be calculated for seven provinces. Of these, Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate. The average low income gap ratio is the percentage of the Low Income Measure that households would require to reach the poverty line. In 2011 it was 24.4% for households with children. This is a measure is of the depth of poverty. This means that in 2011 the average family of four with children would require $9,682.41 more each year to just reach the poverty line.



Source: Statistics Canada (2011). Income in Canada, CANSIM 202-0802.

Data not available for Territories. Aboriginal Reserves are not represented in the data.

3. Profile of Aboriginal children and families

When we look at statistical indicators of how Manitobans are doing economically and socially, we see that on almost every indicator, Aboriginal citizens fare far worse than the rest of society. For example, in 2011, 31.2% of the Aboriginal people in Manitoba lived below the Low Income Cut-Off (after tax) compared to 14.3% of the non-Aboriginal population.

In Manitoba, 16.7% of the population is Aboriginal (199,940), which includes about 63,000 children under the age of 15, according to the 2011 National Household Survey. This is a 22.9% growth in the Aboriginal population between 2006 and 2011. The Aboriginal population is expected to continue to be the fastest growing population in Manitoba and will make up an estimated 20% of the population of Manitoba by 2030. By then, 35% of the Aboriginal population will live in the metropolitan areas, compared with nearly three-quarters of the non-Aboriginal population. About 34% of the Aboriginal people of Manitoba were living in metropolitan areas in 2006. This trend is also likely to continue with more Aboriginal people moving into urban centres, many of whom do so for economic and educational opportunities that are not available on reserves or smaller communities.

Racism and classism continues to pervade the perceptions of the general public regarding the poverty rates in the Aboriginal community. There are widespread misconceptions contributing to the cycle of poverty that worsen its impact. Among these are the damaging myths of deserving and undeserving people who are poor, and victim blaming such as accusing individuals of laziness, of incompetence, of abusing the system and of entitlement. These stereotypes deepen the isolation and sense of shame brought on by poverty itself. In fact, the effect of marginalized poverty is accompanied by a high level of stigma whereby those living in poverty are viewed as maladapted (Paugam 2000).

Considering this and the racism that still prevalent in our society, it is little wonder that such oppressive conditions currently exist. Furthermore, tnis attitude is intergenerational as our children often adopt mainstream views of others from about eight years of age (Chafel 1996).

Chafel, J.A. (1996). Children's Views of Social Inequality: A Review of Research and Implications for Teaching. The Educational Forum, 61, 46-57.

Paugam, S. (2000). Les formes contemporaines de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion en Europe. Études rurales, 159-160, 73-95.

Note : There is a summary of some statistical indicators further in this report on pages 10 and 11.

4. Interpreting the statistics

Finding appropriate statistical information for this report card has been a challenge, and interpreting the statistics is neither simple nor straight forward. We have therefore tried to provide as much background data as possible, but we are cautious about how the statistics can be used or interpreted.

- There is limited Statistics Canada data that includes, or specifically focuses on the experiences of Aboriginal people. For example, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), used to show changes in poverty rates over time, is not available by Aboriginal status.
- The lack of the long-form census has created limitations for comparisons of the data that *is* available. Statistics Canada advises against analyzing trends over time using the National Household Survey as compared to the previous long-form census.
- Some data from the 2011 Census at the neighbourhood level is also not available yet, so we used the 2006 Census where appropriate;
- Additionally, there is the ongoing challenge of getting data on poverty using different measurement tools. We would prefer to use the Low Income Measure – before tax (LIM-BT), but often data is only available using the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) or the Market Basket Measure (MBM).

5. Recommendations

Since the ALL Aboard Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy was announced in 2009, and the enabling legislation passed in 2011, the provincial government has claimed to be reducing poverty. However, it is difficult to find priorities, a clear statement of what the strategy is, and where the improvement in people's lives can be found. More or less, the government has cobbled together a framework of random programs, promises and projections under the guise of a strategy.

There has been some important effort to coordinate programs across government departments, but the government has not yet delivered on important commitments like meaningful consultation on the action plans, evaluation tools, targets and timelines. Most important, in our opinion, is that the government approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion remains exclusively government oriented and therefore programmatically fragmented and practically weak. There appears to be little practical collaboration with local business and community agencies to mount a major campaign to reduce poverty.

The following recommendations were generated by community partners in Manitoba who work with children and families, including Aboriginal kids and families. The recommendations are framed as actions that should be added to the ALL Aboard Action Plans in these three areas.

5.1. Early childhood development and parenting supports

General comments on the ALL Aboard Action Plan

When considering actions the government could take to lift children out of poverty, we need to be able to identify those most affected by poverty. These families need very basic necessities first! Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' tells us that safe affordable housing and food security are fundamental to early childhood development. The government action plan for children needs to include reference to how the basic needs of these families will be addressed. There must be an increase in the supply of social housing, and ways to promote affordable rental housing. Similarly, legislating fair food prices in the north would ensure nutritious food is accessible to families there.

A more coordinated ALL Aboard strategy would also address the gaps between services. These varied groups work within a prevention continuum of care and support across Manitoba. A similar level of support, care, development, and investment should be expected in any region, but various departments and groups do not communicate. They do not share information. This allows for duplication of services and wastes valuable funding. This is true for departments within the government, but also with nonprofit and service agencies.

The Manitoba Child Care Association has called on the government to build an integrated public system of early learning and child care drawing on the international best practices. They also are recommending the setting up of a Commission on Integrated Early Learning and Child Care for Manitoba with the mandate and resources to develop a multi-year plan for child care. This plan should be based on:

- a systematic and integrated approach to early learning and child care policy
- a strong and equal partnership with the education system
- a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children with special needs
- substantial public investment in services and infrastructure
- a participatory community based approach to quality improvement and assurance
- appropriate training and working conditions for staff
- systematic attention to data collection and monitoring; and
- a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

Recommendations for specific programs in the ALL Aboard Action Plan

Triple P Parenting. This program was very poorly rolled out and assumed all parents were on an equal playing field. It assumed all families have a safe place to live, food security, access to support, and this is simply not true! Triple P Parenting is insensitive to traditional Aboriginal parenting methods and is an example of the government saying this is the way to parent and your culture is irrelevant, whether you are Aboriginal or an immigrant.

Investment in new child cares spaces. Of course, we need more investment in child care with almost 9,700 kids on the waiting lists for child care. However, the government's own initiatives are at odds with fulfilling the action items to expand child care. Many schools are incorporating daycares, but the government is expanding to full day kindergarten and reducing the student teacher ratio in K-3 classes to a maximum of 20 students. As a result, family resource rooms are threatened and there is pressure to give up child care space. This takes away from the space for daycares.

There are many barriers to creating new child care spaces in schools. There must be action to reduce the red tape involved in turning empty class rooms into child care spaces. It is almost easier to build new than to utilize existing facilities. Also, in rural areas, it's not just finding space for child care, it's also getting transportation to the space.

Wages for early child educators and child care subsidies. There must be training and living wages to allow children in our communities to be cared for as individuals in our communities. Along with increased wages for daycare workers, there must also be the money for subsidies for daycare. Full subsidy is $2 per day. To some this is nothing, but to many this is a huge amount, especially when you put it together with transportation costs. It becomes cost prohibitive to work and cheaper to stay home. The fee for subsidized care has been a long-standing issue that needs to be eliminated.

Childcare. Improvements must focus on practical needs for supporting child care professionals in the province and recognize their contribution to reducing poverty. A more rapid increase in the number of child care spaces and a more consistent and sustained approach to programming are also essential.

Community schools and meal programs. Half of the hungry in Manitoba are children, and education systems are limited. In what they can and should do. Meal programs at school seem like a natural solution, but we must question if children should be eating at school programs or if they should be eating at home. Families sharing meals and having food security is essential to healthy development in communities. In the long run, programs that ensure children are well fed at home have other benefits besides nutrition.

The Families First Program. This was identified as a very important and respected program, but it does not apply to families living on-reserve. Strengthening Families is a federal program similar to Families First but is only available to 14 of 63 First Nation communities in Manitoba. Funding is the issue for the other 49 reserves not having access to this service. This is a Federal funding shortfall, but communities that do not have access to healthy supports impact the rest of Manitoba and end up using Manitoba-funded services in the long term. The province should close this service gap (in cooperation with other levels of government) to ensure all Aboriginal families have access to preschool support.

Many indigenous cultures the world over use a medicine wheel to guide individual, community and societal wellbeing. The medicine wheel gives a holistic view of what we all need to be healthy and participate in our communities.

2013 Manitoba Aboriginal Child & Family Poverty Profile

N (Elder)

W (Adult)

E (Child)

S (Youth)

CULTURAL

SOCIAL

POLITICAL

ECONOMIC/ ENVIRONMENT

Participating in Adult Learning

Graduation Rates

Employment Rates

Children in care

Children in registered child care

Income Levels

EDI Scores

Core Housing Need

Mind Spirit Body Emotion

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Providing integrated supports. Lord Selkirk Park Housing Development is a great program benefitting about 40 children. It should be expanded to all Manitoba Housing family developments, then into other areas to have child care with other supports.

The Families First Program. This program was identified as having a positive effect against poverty. Education and support have a huge impact on early child development. The approach must be building on the strength of families and helping them to build positive relationships in light of a troubled past. This allows for children to grow up emotionally healthy. Plus it is the first step to building healthy families and keeping families together, as opposed to involving CFS and separating family members. The goal must be to reverse the trends of poverty contributing and even causing family breakdown.

5.2. Creating Opportunities for Youth

General comments on the ALL Aboard Action Plan

The All Aboard Action Plan lacks the input of community organizations with experience working with youth, and this has to be corrected for the best outcomes. For example, there are many community groups with years of experience in career development and after-school programs. However, these groups were not part of the development of the action plan in these areas. Rather, the government visited other jurisdictions to create the after-school programs. Each area of the action plan should have existing community networks advising and engaged in the action plan. The Youth Agencies Alliance has 19 organizations in Winnipeg that are a natural fit. Instead, the government tried to create a new network of after-school programs.

The government keeps creating very small programs that make it look like they are dealing with an issue, but the scope of the program is so small it does not make an impact to the scope of the challenge. For example the Work2IT Program in the Pas. There are serious questions about how all these small youth initiatives are being implemented. These new smaller programs ignore past learning and community experience. Rather than just relying on government staff to develop these strategies without real community input or little on-the-ground experience, we need collaboration.

The action plan needs to facilitate better coordination and integration of services. This would create a coherent strategy. More targeted or focused investments in the delivery of services and better coordination of funding for programs is necessary to improve the plan.

It is unclear what youth and outcomes the ALL Aboard Action Plan is targeting. Many youth are dealing with a history of trauma, so there is a need for trauma-informed approaches, and a statement of the impact of trauma. Action plans must consider trauma and use approaches that work (for example, using the Circle of Courage to guide youth programming). There must also be the space for kids to make mistakes and not have dire consequences, such as apprehension by CFS, loss of EIA, or getting expelled from school. Aboriginal kids and families are dealing with a history of trauma through colonization, residential schools, and CFS. Many others also deal with abuse or FASD, etc. Newcomers have left refugee camps and fled war zones. There must be a focus on making it easier to help kids and youth to give something back using a restorative justice approach.

Recommendations for specific programs in ALL Aboard

Work2IT. This youth program was unrecognized by Winnipeg youth agency staff, who question the scope and how well is it promoted? It is recommended youth be engaged since they know what they are interested in and have better ideas for program names. Work2IT is not a name kids would choose and it is questionable if Aboriginal kids would be drawn to a program with this name.

Youth Opportunities Department. This is a new department but it contains nothing new. Its programs are not coordinated, and it has no new money. The department should be better coordinating things like an inventory of mentoring programs and other programs with a focus on guiding the expansion and scaling up of these programs so they help more kids across the province.

The Action Plan should coordinate job skills programs targeting low income youth in a coordinated implementation strategy. There is a need to focus on life skills, like maintaining a home, cooking and nutrition, and other areas like gardening. What often results in job loss is not a problem with work skills, but rather it is a problem with life skills and life balance.

One inner city employment program helps 15 kids per year in with job placement. This four- month program costs $75,000 per year for one staff person who is paid $18 per hour. This also pays for year round jobs support and resume development, job coaching and training, etc., and a youth crew program which provides odd jobs in the community for youth for over 120 kids signed up. With youth unemployment stubbornly high, we need a collaborative strategy that will work in a variety of communities. The money investment just isn't there now.

After School Leaders Program. Not all approaches work for all kids. For some kids, after-school programs work in a school setting, while for others a community setting is required. To reach some kids, extending school hours would work. This is based on an Australian approach, that put fun activities earlier in the day and the academic work later in the afternoon. There are other kids who are not connected to and don't trust schools. We need other facilities where we can educate and reach kids such as off campus programs. A new Provincial fund for off campus programs is needed.

One of the challenges of programming for low income kids is to link parents and support for parents, especially for parents of older kids. Parents and their role are often replaced by after-school programs, meal programs, and tutoring/mentoring programs. This is tough due to poverty and parents who work odd hours. Many kids most in need of support don't have parents to advocate for them, and many systems require an adult with a strong connection to the child to walk with them through various programs.

Recreation and sports funds. These grants do not support transportation, staff, or food. The barriers for youth participation are very different than how these grant programs are structured and what they provide. Also, groups have to put a lot of time into applying for these funds. One group recently applied for $10,000 with a major proposal for a youth program and they received only $500. In community centres, not all neighbourhoods have volunteers to run these programs, there is a need for paid staff within the community.

Reliable funding is stable, predictable, and allows for long term staff retention, so staff can then develop the long term relationships with kids. Studies show that for afterschool programs to have the protective and preventative benefits that blunt the impacts of poverty, it is these relationships that are essential. These relationships with kids are not possible when programs come and go, staff come and go, and programs are offered sporadically. The Boys and Girls Club has a good success with employing their former kids as Youth Rec Workers.

After the School Bell Rings Program. This program uses an RFP or business model for granting funds. It pays per youth who attend the program. This approach makes it difficult to sustain funding and does not work for drop-in programs. Maximizing the use of community facilities has to be a priority. Many schools and community centres, are under-used. We have to make schools and other safe places the 7/11's of a community and keep the facilities open later. In one example at Hugh John Macdonald School there has been a focus on engaged with the community that is having a profound effect on the stability of youth.

Light House. This program funds $12,000 per year, but this is only a quarter of the cost for the youth program offered in a neighbourhood. The $12,000 only funds two nights per week. A program running only two nights per week would not prevent crime in the way the Light House program aims to prevent crime. Also, funding programs need to take a community development approach. For example, after-school leaders need to come from the neighbourhood, so local kids get jobs, income, and experience. These programs provide service and training. Rossbrook House has a successful program that uses Light House money to support the partial costs of programs.

Expand Jordan's Principle. Jordan's Principle is an important guide for other areas of social support besides its applications in health. The bickering between federal and provincial governments over jurisdiction and who is responsible for on-reserve residents is hampering stable program implementation and having long term negative effects on individuals, families, and Aboriginal communities. There should be new agreements between all levels of government to avoid miring support programs in jurisdictional disputes over funding and responsibility.

Connect work transition more effectively to training The ALL Aboard Action Plan is not connected to the Labour Market Training Strategy to ensure 75,000 skilled employees by the year 2015 and the employment of people with disabilities must have more focus as part of the 75,000 worker goal. The government can work with community and private sector partners to ensure Federal funds are retained.

Some First Nations people feel they have to leave the reserve for opportunities and training, as there is little opportunity on-reserve. However, many are reluctant to leave family and community. This forces Aboriginal people to make an often impossible decision other Manitobans do not have to make. It sets them up for failure by being away from family as a teen or young adult. Plus, the brightest are often taken away from their communities, and many do not return. For youth leaving their reserves, integrating culture into their education and life must be funded. There are community groups that can do this, but they require recognition and support. Aboriginal professionals would also benefit from these programs. The Urban Eagle Transition Centre is providing settlement and support services for Aboriginal people coming to Winnipeg, this is an essential service that requires expanded support.

The most comprehensive approaches to reducing poverty address low wages. Better protection against exploitation of part time workers, benefits for part time work, part time worker tax credits, and affirmative action programs targeting low skilled occupations where single parent women and Aboriginal people work, are all necessary.

Currently the ALL Aboard Action Plan strategy (to transition people from EIA to employment) is starting with single parents. While a number of these parents are likely Aboriginal, there must be other strategies for Aboriginal people on EIA to get the support necessary to move from EIA to work.

Reform Child and Family Services. Studies show that children who receive CFS care are more likely to have long term challenges, are more likely to not graduate from school, and are more likely to be unemployed, poor and even homeless as adults. The poverty action plans must better reflect this reality with more attention to youth involved with CFS. The current Phoenix Sinclair inquiry report, which will have recommendations to improve CFS, should be incorporated into the ALL Aboard Action Plan.

The basic approach of CFS must change to one of prevention and family support. Youth should not have to be "in the care" of CFS to receive services. Parents should not have to sign their kids over to CFS to receive support. There must be a plan to make the child welfare system more transparent and accessible so parents have the chance to respond in socially-engaged and responsible ways if encountering the child welfare system.

As part of moving CFS to a more prevention-oriented service, there is a need for clear, understandable and widely distributed info about the child welfare process, law and structure for families involved with CFS. Families and children (especially youth in care) need to know how child protection issues and the CFS system impact their choices and responsibilities in clear, specific ways or they are only further marginalized and intergenerational trauma is intensified.

CFS must see other community supports as partners in working with families. Families and youth should be encouraged to bring in their own community supports during child protection work. This is an area with high conflict due to the polarizing nature of the child welfare system, we need to develop capacity in the community for effective community response during the child protection process. CFS agencies and staff need to welcome this community support for families. Work has begun on a Signs of Safety for families engaged with CFS, as some CFS authorities are already initiating this approach.

New affordable housing options. Many kids in care would do well in family groupings with (including workers and a number of youth) rather than isolated in their own apartments at a young age. New models for housing Aboriginal youth coming to urban centres for education and training must have built-in supports. Youth need a housing-first approach. Many of the strategies for Aboriginal youth would do well to incorporate a Circle of Courage approach.

There are a lot of programs and activities the government has included in ALL Aboard that deal with various areas, but there are no clear actions in their plans that will increase the incomes for those families who are the poorest, on EIA, or working part time on low income. The government was recognized in 1999 when they made a commitment to end the claw back of the Child Tax Credit for

families on EIA, however the benefits of this change have long been eroded. Moreover, this change prevents these families from qualifying for other support like Rent Aid. Rent Aid should be available to all families living in poverty.

The youth action plan must include more safe places that are open all hours. This includes drop-ins and safe houses with food and other supports. These services must be offered outside of any CFS mandate.

5.3. Closing the gap for Aboriginal Manitobans

General Comments on the ALL Aboard Action Plan

The Action Plan has a mix of supports, which is positive and indicates government trying to be comprehensive, but the mix does not focus on at-risk families, hunger, and bad housing. There must be specific strategies for Aboriginal housing, and meeting other basic needs. What is also missing from the government's Action Plan is any "voice of the people most affected." By voice we mean the Action Plan does not acknowledge the individual and family benefits or change that will lead to people exiting poverty. Serious attention is needed to provide family supports—parenting skills, economic stability for a whole family, and healthy housing.

While ALL Aboard is full of good intentions and is in other policies of government, yet there were often not enough resources or support to implement these. This puts new stresses on front line workers and organizations. Some of the programs in the plan are precarious because of short term government funding, especially for community based programs where renewal often seems like a threat.

The ALL Aboard action plan does not give enough emphasis to the role of culture and tradition in improving First Nations' economic status. A relationship to culture determines how people fit into mainstream society. "You have to know who you are before you can assimilate in a way that is good for you and mainstream society," one Aboriginal Elder said in a community meeting. The ALL Aboard Plan would do well to develop programs that build understanding and collaboration between Aboriginal people and immigrants/refugees in Manitoba. At the community level, animosities can develop between the two groups around issues regarding who has more needs and who deserves more support.

Recommendations for specific programs in ALL Aboard

Indicators for Aboriginal Action Plan. There is a need for indicators of success for initiatives aimed at moving Aboriginal people out of poverty. There are currently no indicators for Aboriginal areas of the Action Plan.

Large Development Investments. The action plan includes the East Side Road, an $86.5 million investment. If this is in part a poverty reduction measure, then evaluation must be included to track the cost of living, food, etc., and the improvements in services that come from the development. Similarly, the large investments in the University College of the North, MB Hydro, Capital Project Tendering, and training and opportunities for Aboriginal persons must demonstrate improved outcomes for First Nations in the north.

People need supports to overcome the multitude of barriers they face in accessing educational opportunities – and these are embedded in families and communities. Education is a central need and plays a central role in helping people get out of poverty. All levels of education are needed to fit into the Manitoba economy, which would lead to independent incomes and a reduction of poverty. The ALL Aboard Action Plan needs to reflect this.

There is a reference in ALL Aboard to **Adult Learning Centres** that provide opportunities to get a high school diploma, however, of the over 9000 people registered for adult learning programs in 2012, only 14% got their diploma that year. Plus, 40% (or 3600) of those registered are Aboriginal people with only 530 graduates. This suggests there is room for improvements and Adult Learning Centres are not working for the vast majority of Aboriginal people. There must be a strategy to improve adult learning programs by integrating support and traditional approaches, and track retention rates since many people take more than one year to graduate. Adult Learning Centres that are the most successful are often small programs that are culturally relevant and close to home and child care. For example, the Turtle Island ALC Kaakiyow has a stronger retention rate due to a trimester system, an emphasis on strong relationships between instructors and students, no homework, and incorporation of traditional Aboriginal approaches.

The Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) Grants. These grants for schools, to support Aboriginal student achievement, are not always being used as was intended. To make use of educational opportunities, a person needs a number of supports that come from family and community. People need such things as housing, income, moral support, life skills training, a sense of identity and pride, backup security and other situational help to take advantage of training and educational opportunities. Some of these supports were already embedded in First Nations culture and communities where people still help each other and know who they are and what they want out of their lives. Schools have a role to help connect every kid to something positive, and to help them to set goals.

Post-Secondary Student Supports. Federal government funding support for students from Aboriginal communities must be increases to meet the education requirements and treaty obligations. Currently 40,000 Aboriginal students in Canada qualify for PSE funding but do not receive it and do not get an education. The number in Manitoba is not known but all Aboriginal students who can succeed in PSE should have the support to graduate with a university degree.

Northern Prosperity Initiative. This is a long overdue plan to engage northern Aboriginal People in plans to develop northern communities. A local economic development approach that connects local needs to job creation is essential as a poverty reduction strategy for Aboriginal communities. For example, focused training and employment in housing construction and retrofitting, ensuring safe water and sewage development and maintenance, and food security. Some communities pool funds for social assistance into new programs that create employment and economic development. The Government of Manitoba can help lead this with federal government assistance.

6. Conclusion and Follow up Action

A Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plans would be successful if it narrows the gap between "where people are in their lives and where they want to be" (quote by a participant in one of the consultation sessions). In other words, ALL Aboard must be oriented to individuals and families and what they require to escape impoverished conditions.

From our point of view, ALL Aboard is a collection of government initiatives that were mainly in place prior to the passing the legislation for the Strategy. It is not an integrated plan developed to reduce poverty for targeted indicators and populations. Many of these initiatives are important for helping people cope with poverty conditions, but alone they are not ambitious enough to reduce poverty. There are many Aboriginal programs and organizations in the community for example, that are proving successful and these should be better resourced and replicated, but these are not enough to seriously address deeply rooted poverty.

A dynamic poverty reduction strategy is more than a package of programs or a list of activities. A strategy should focus attention on central formative action, reform existing programs like Employment and Income Assistance and Child and Family Services, motivate people to innovate and do more, as well at strategy should maximize the use of limited finances and attract broad support and resources.

A coordinated and defined strategy that taps into community resources and is sustainable, would make a difference in the lives of thousands of people. The Action Plan would benefit from improved engagement with the various coalitions in Manitoba, such as parent child coalitions, for example. There is a huge need to bring these groups together to share information and resources and then collaborate. The government can do more to facilitate communication, sharing and cooperation among agencies.

The government cannot create all the jobs required nor build all the affordable housing needed as part of a serious effort to help people living in poverty. A partnership of government, developers, employers, public institutions (like hospitals or universities) and community organizations can do more to support public programs than policy changes alone.

At a broader level, there is a need for communication and meaningful public consultation, as reducing poverty will need community support. The community and our economy will benefit from a reduction in poverty, and we can share some of the load of change.

Over the next six months, a series of meetings and discussions will take place to examine other Action Plans within the Strategy, and to make recommendations similar to those in this report. It will then be up to the government to listen to these recommendations and act upon them, or to continue on its path of controlled isolation.

7. Contributors

Organizations that have been involved in the development of this report include the following. Their extensive knowledge, experience and commitment to helping children and their families is the foundation for the perspectives in this report. However, the articulation of these recommendations and their presentation are the sole responsibility of the Social Planning Council.

Aboriginal Circle of Educators

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

Manitoba Child Care Coalition

Winnipeg Harvest

Family Dynamics

Spence Neighbourhood Association

Manitoba Child Care Association

North Point Douglas Women's Centre

Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre

Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development

West Central Women's Resource Centre

Neegenan Centre Aboriginal Centre

Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council -Welcome Place

Families and Communities Together (FACT)

YMCA/YWCA

Rossbrook House

Manitoba Federation of Labour

Strengthening Families (AMC)

Communities 4 Families

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Manitoba School Boards Association

North End Community Renewal Corporation

UM Faculty of Social Work

8. Data Sources:

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